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# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

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VOLUME XXXVI - NUMBER 3

MARCH 1957



YOSEMITE VALLEY, WINTER  
—Ansel Adams

# MISSION 66

*What it is.*—MISSION 66 is a conservation program for the National Park System and all other areas managed by the National Park Service.

Conservation is generally defined as wise use; this 10-year program is intended so to develop and staff these priceless possessions of the American people as to permit their wisest possible use; maximum enjoyment for those who use them; and maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, and historic resources that give them distinction.

Construction is, of course, an important element of the program. Modern roads, well-planned trails, utilities, camp and picnic grounds, and many kinds of structures needed for public use or administration, to meet the requirements of an expected 80,000,000 visitors in 1966, are necessary; but they are simply one of the means by which "enjoyment-without-impairment" is to be provided.

*What it will do.*—MISSION 66 will replace outmoded and inadequate facilities with physical improvements adequate for expected demands but so designed and located as to reduce the impact of public use on valuable and destructible features.

It will provide both facilities and personnel for visitor services of the quality and quantity that the public is entitled to expect in its National Park System. It is intended to assure the fullest possible degree of protection both to visitors and resources.

*The reason for its name.*—MISSION 66 is a long-range program; it will require at least 10 years to accomplish on a sound and realistic dollar basis. That means completion in 1966—the 50th anniversary year of the establishment of the National Park Service.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND  
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

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## CHAPARRAL BIRDS AT WAWONA

By Gerald Robinson, Ranger-Naturalist

Most of the commonly visited areas in Yosemite National Park are located in forests that are largely coniferous. Visitors who are especially interested in birds usually must either be content with the birds of these conifer forests or else walk over rough country in the lower elevations of the park to see the birds which frequent the brush or chaparral areas. There are, however, a few places within the normally coniferous areas that, thanks to either a poor soil or a southern exposure are covered with brush and form an almost typical chaparral community. One of these areas is within easy

walking distance of the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. stables at Wawona. By walking about 1 mile along the trail from near the stables toward Deer Camp and Alder Creek, you can find yourself in the middle of a fairly extensive patch of chaparral.

Such a stand gives the visitor not only an opportunity to see some of these chaparral birds but also to compare the songs and actions of several closely related species. Among these are the California and stellar jays and the brown, spotted and greentailed Towhees.

During just one visit to this area and the surrounding clumps of trees, the author saw the following birds:

Red-tailed hawk, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, California woodpecker, red-shafted flicker, ash-throated flycatcher, olive-sided flycatcher, wood pewee, Steller jay, California jay, mountain chickadee, bush-tit, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, wren-tit, warbling vireo, Nashville warbler, Audubon warbler, black-throated gray warbler, yellow warbler, hermit warbler, black-headed grosbeak, western tanager, California purple finch, Cassin purple finch, spotted towhee, brown towhee, green-tailed towhee, and Oregon junco.



Stellar Jay

## A SUBSTITUTE FOR DISHES

By Donald R. Brown, Ranger-Naturalist

As a 10 year old boy determined to become scarce at dish-washing time on the home ranch, Don went hustling around the rock pile and climbed quickly into an old oak. Settling himself there with an eye peeled towards the kitchen door, he was getting drowsy when he noticed "Old Yeller," a 4 foot gopher snake crawl into the rock pile. Because he quickly decided the pleasure of adding this beauty to his snake collection was not worth the risk of having to wash or dry that mountain of dishes after a big dinner for the family and the hay crew, Don lounged on in the tree house.

Soon his eye was again attracted to the same spot, this time by a moving collection of black and white rings. It was "Zebra," a large California King Snake, traveling along the path made just a few minutes earlier by Old Yeller.

Don immediately sat up and took notice as Old Yeller came crawling rapidly out from the pile of rocks on the other side. By now Don could sense a conflict in the offing for he knew that Zebra ate other snakes and that both he and Old Yeller were constrictors, killing or maiming their prey by the use of coils thrown around the body. Once the coils of a gopher snake are around an animal, his life span is decidedly shortened.

In the hot May sunshine, Don could see that Zebra was suffering from the heat and so Don gently persuaded Old Yeller to remain under the shade of a blue oak until battle was joined. This was not long for Zebra seemed to crawl a little faster than Old Yeller and his nose kept him unerringly on the trail.

Crawling boldly up to Old Yeller, Zebra flicked out his tongue several



"Zebra" was a large California King Snake

mes and—then struck! But Old Yeller was no novice in this game of life or death and replied in kind. You could still see that Old Yeller had no taste for this sort of thing; several times he attempted to escape.

A last Zebra secured a jawhold in Old Yeller about 8 inches from his head. The battle raged fiercely, both snakes attempting to get coils around the body of the other. Muscles tensed as over and over they thrashed, neither able to gain an advantage. Gradually the boy noticed a peculiar motion of Zebra's head. Whenever Old Yeller tried to rest quietly, Zebra would loosen the grip with his upper teeth and move the jaw slightly towards Old Yeller's head. The action was then repeated with the lower jaw. Soon Zebra's jaws were closing over the upper jaw. Sensing that this must be the last effort, Old Yeller opened his

jaws as wide as possible. But to no avail; the superior strength of Zebra finally forced Old Yeller's jaws closed and the almost imperceptible movement forward of the jaws began again.

The end was near. Having his entire head swallowed deprived Old Yeller of air. Soon he was merely a beautiful quivering body — slowly, quarter-inch by quarter-inch being swallowed by Zebra.

By this time most of the excitement was over and Don realized that the entire family and hay crew had gathered to watch the spectacle. Gone was any thought of evading the dishes, gone was all thought except that he had witnessed a spectacle as old as life itself — a chapter in the never ending struggle for survival which goes on forever in nature.



## ACORN-STORING WOODPECKERS

By Henry G. Weston, Jr., Ranger-Naturalist

The uniqueness of the California woodpecker is most aptly described in its more common name, the California acorn woodpecker. As a species, found ranging widely in California west of the Sierra Nevada mountains from near the Oregon line south to the Mexican border, it is normally found inhabiting woodlands composed of, or at least including, oak trees of one kind or another. In Yosemite Valley it is one of the most common of the resident birds.

Anyone studying this woodpecker immediately notes the unique feature that sets it apart from all other woodpeckers, the habit of storing acorns. This habit reaches its peak late each summer and fall as the

acorn crop matures. In the Yosemite region only the gray squirrel perhaps exceeds the California woodpecker in efforts to gather and store the fruit of the oaks. However, unlike the gray squirrels, the results of the woodpecker's work are well advertised. For generations, this bird has riddled the bark of trees such as incense cedar and ponderosa pine, and stuffed the resulting holes with acorns. The trees in question are frequently referred to as "cupboard trees" or woodpecker "storehouses." The acorns so stored are then normally used for food at some later date.

Ritter<sup>1</sup> has probably devoted more time to the study of this bird than any other one observer. He comments that "the basic facts, stated



by many observers with little modification, are these: The birds drill holes, each approximately the size of an acorn, typically in the bark of a tree. They then bring acorns, one by one, and insert them into the holes, the big end outward. As a rule, the acorns fit the holes so closely that after being vigorously pounded in by the birds they are flush with the surface of the bark, or may even be countersunk, and are held so tightly as to be removed with difficulty. Almost without exception the holes do not reach entirely through the bark."

Different types of acorns exhibit a great range in size and we must marvel at the seeming ingenuity displayed in the excavation of the holes, almost always to a diameter to admit each acorn only with a tight fit. To chisel a hole for each individual acorn is an enormous task. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the magnitude of the task involved in the storing of the acorns. Ritter estimated the presence of 31,800 holes in an old yellow pine log in the San Jacinto mountains. Grinnell<sup>2</sup> lists two examples from Yosemite Valley. In one 45 foot-high dead incense cedar trunk he estimated the presence of 2,360 holes. In a large living ponderosa pine an estimate of 10,500 holes was obtained. Dawson<sup>3</sup> estimated 20,000 holes were present in a giant sycamore near Santa Barbara. In the San Jacinto mountains he found a ponderosa pine containing no less than 50,000 holes.

Sometimes the acorns are stored in objects other than trees. Telephone and light poles, as well as wooden fence posts, are frequently utilized. Dawson found a small telephone pole near Marysville containing 1,500 holes. In Yosemite valley light poles and even sides and



roofs of wooden buildings have been utilized, occasionally resulting in serious damage. Ritter refers to the use of objects other than trees for storage as "maladaptation." He describes finding an old abandoned wooden miner's house. Woodpeckers had chiseled many holes clear through the outer boards. As a result virtually none of the acorns put into the holes stopped there, but fell down on the inside. Calculations, made for the acorns found in two door casings and two window casings, added up to 62,264. Acorns in the other parts of the house brought the total to even a greater number. All of these were lost to the birds as they stuffed them, one by one, into the holes in the boards.

In various parts of California items other than acorns, such as hazelnuts, walnuts of several kinds, almonds and pecans, are gathered and stored. In addition to these items we can add a list of rather surprising objects that have been recorded as being stored by these birds. This list includes date pits, cherry pits, prune pits, bracts of pine cones,



pieces of bark and even pebbles and rock fragments.

Speculation is still prevalent as to the specific purpose or cause of the strange habit of chiseling holes in trees and then storing items in them. The purpose in storing acorns for future use as food seems logical except for the fact that non-food items, such as those in the list above, are occasionally gathered and stored. These, in Ritter's words "tend to dis-

pel the conjecture of something superavian" in the general activities of the species. Whatever the cause or result of the storing habit may be, we need at least not question that acorns are preeminently the staff of life of this woodpecker. Their tireless work goes on generation after generation, sometimes seemingly with a purpose in mind, sometimes seemingly without.

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### THE BIG-EARED BAT COMES TO YOSEMITE

By Elbert M. Brock, Museum Assistant

On July 25, 1956, a solitary male big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus rafinesquii intermedius*), was collected in Yosemite Valley. Although this bat is widespread in California, no specimens of this species have been acquired for the Yosemite Museum collection. Grinnell and Storer (1924), and Parker (1952), do not include *Corynorhinus* in their checklists of Yosemite mammals.

This species is normally a cave bat, but it can often be found in tunnels and attics. Nursing colonies (consisting of nearly all females) occur in caves and buildings, while males will often be found as solitary individuals in warm attics or other wellings. This mammal, also known as the lump-nosed bat, can be readily identified by its very large ears and the two prominent lumps located on each side of the muzzle, between the nose and the eyes.

The bat was found in the attic of an old abandoned building located on a small side road 4.2 miles west of Yosemite Village in Yosemite Valley. The bat was resting on the center beam of the roof supports. In my attempts to reach it with a net, it

became disturbed and flew several times back and forth in the attic and disappeared. Searching a small adjoining attic, I once again located the bat but it immediately took flight. By standing in the door I limited the flying area of the bat and was thereby able to capture it in flight. The specimen is now in the Yosemite Museum collection.

When I returned to this same locality the following day at 4:30 p.m., another big-eared bat was observed resting in the attic. It was close enough to insure a positive identification and yet far enough away so that it could not be caught. It took flight, circled the room two or three times, and left the building via the doorway. On August 1, 1956 another specimen (perhaps the same individual seen July 26) was collected from the same location. This was also a male.

Since the big-eared bat has not been mentioned in previous checklists of Yosemite mammals, it is a noteworthy addition to include this animal with the rest of the Yosemite fauna.

## A NOTE ON JOHN MUIR

By Shirley Sargent

In 1912 a hospital was built in Yosemite Valley by United States troops and the Sierra Club purchased the Soda Springs property at Tuolumne Meadows. In 1912, John Muir, president of the club for 22 years, and defender of the Sierras for all his adult life, made his last trip to Yosemite National Park.

L. P. Bagnard of Pasadena, California, then in his early twenties, well remembers the trip —and Muir. As a friend of F. W. Kellogg, young "Bert" Bagnard was invited to join a party of 10 on a pleasure trip through Sequoia National Park and Yosemite. As he recalls the group consisted of the Ellis', Dorothy and Bill Kellogg, a Mrs. Fisk, the young Kelloggs, Muir and himself.

In 1912 cars were still a novelty (in fact they were not admitted into Yosemite until 1915) and Bert was delighted to drive a Model X 1909 Stevens Dureya. A 1909 Cadillac carried half the party. From Hollywood, where they had picked up John Muir, they drove on the existing roads to Santa Barbara, Paso Robles and Three Rivers.

"There weren't any freeways in those days, Bagnard remembers, "just hardways." Bumpy dirt roads with few gas stations or garages to help a stranded motorist. Gasoline sold in 5 gal. cans at 50c per gallon. The drivers in those days knew what was under the hood and how to make repairs. They had to."

At Three Rivers they changed to a stage as automobiles weren't allowed in Sequoia either. They stayed a week.

"The drive into Yosemite was adventurous all right," Bagnard says, "but at the time it seemed more like hard work." Frequently he had to



John Muir (Bagnard photo)

put a tree trunk between the two cars and shove the Cadillac. Both cars were left at Wawona, where the group took the stage on into Yosemite Valley.

The Muir party stayed at Cam Curry for a week. It was an exciting week for all. They rode saddle horses to see the waterfalls, the granite cliffs, and the Valley floor itself. Young Bagnard's visit was made even more memorable because Muir — explorer, geologist, naturalist, writer and mountaineer — was often the guide.

"He was a quiet man, always inspecting trees and twigs, and I

ould answer any question." Bagnard talked of the trails they took. Muir could name every bush on any of them. He was a grand old man."

The pioneers that he had known well in his sheep herding and Valley days were gone and Muir kept to himself, though welcoming questions. Another famed naturalist, botanist Dr. Albert Kellog, was in the park and the two men had long conversations.

David Curry was so pleased to have the two of them that he put on a night for them at his camp. At least a hundred campers heard these authorities speak of earlier days and the struggle to turn Yosemite into a National Park. Kellog gave a practical demonstration on how to start a fire with a drill. Best made with oak or white pine. The unrehearsed program was an immense success.

Bagnard says, "I took my family—

three boys—back to Yosemite Valley in 1924 and this time I didn't have to push."

That year Government Center was being developed and the deer were suffering from an epidemic of hoof and mouth disease. Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, which Muir had fought against for 12 bitter years, was a reality. "It wasn't mountains any more though — too civilized."

Even the campfire programs were planned; not spontaneous like the time they got Muir to talking.

As president of the Sierra Club, from its inception in 1892 until his death, John Muir was probably the one individual most responsible, through his writings and friends, for the creation of Yosemite as a National Park. He richly deserved the tribute of the early campers and all others through the years. Two years later in 1914, at 78, he died, but his words and work have lived after him.



Seeing Yosemite in 1912 (Bagnard photo)



**STORM SCARRED PINE****(Sentinel Dome, Yosemite National Park)****By Jack A. Holmes**

Oh, haggard pine, with conquering hand,  
Oh, fearless lonely mate,  
I fancy legends as you stand —  
The reason for your fate?  
I've asked the winds, O' royal sage  
To tell me of your hermitage.

They've whispered, you, O' free-lance pine,  
Have risen from the ranks.  
They told me when you left the line  
With King Sequoia's thanks,  
You took a long and solemn vow  
To hold your own by knotted bough.

You swore, with shapeless twisted grip  
To stand upon your dome;  
And with your mighty branches whip  
The winds that blast your home.  
They say your spirit's unafraid  
And often they have felt your blade.



Et, "Storm Scarred Pine" of Sentinel Dome,  
 Pause in your battling strife.  
 Look down below your sentinel home  
 Where gored that glacial knife.  
 Fight out beyond that wonderous vast  
 Where dreamy clouds go floating past.

Now feast your heart without alarm  
 Upon that rugged crest —  
 Absorb this great surrounding charm,  
 And that your well-earned rest.  
 Oh, Pine, exalt upon this scene  
 And ask yourself: What does it mean?

Then when you've filled your soul entire,  
 And when your head is bent —  
 Then harken to that frozen choir  
 Of snowy sacrament,  
 And offer yours in silent theme  
 Along with this great void supreme.

In awe you'll tremble at the gorge,  
 As would a reverent tree.  
 O' mighty was the hand to forge  
 This grand Yosemite.  
 Now look where drops this great expanse  
 Sheered clean by nature's icy lance —

There slipping from enchanted walls  
 With Neptune's new-born fire,  
 Tumbles majestic waterfalls  
 In gleaming white attire.  
 I envy you, old storm scarred pine,  
 And wish your home were also mine.

And if I were a storm scarred pine  
 Commanding such a view,  
 I'd stand upon a dome divine —  
 Defy the winds which blew.  
 I'd fight for this old Sentinel Dome,  
 And keep it for my very own.

tree that stands so vulnerable,  
 In tribute let me chant;  
 Each spirit is invincible,  
 Yours is a noble grant.  
 I know to hold your throne sublime  
 You'll battle 'til the end of time!  
 tree that stands so vulnerable,



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YOSEMITE FALLS, MIRROR EFFECT

—Peabody, c. 1880

